Unit .14

Session .03

An Idolatrous People Receive Judgment

Scripture

2 Kings 17:6-20

6 In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria captured
Samaria. He deported the Israelites to Assyria and settled
them in Halah, along the Habor (Gozan's river), and in
the cities of the Medes. **7** This disaster happened because
the people of Israel sinned against the Lord their God
who had brought them out of the land of Egypt from
the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt and because they
worshiped other gods. **8** They lived according to the
customs of the nations that the Lord had dispossessed
before the Israelites and according to what the kings of
Israel did. **9** The Israelites secretly did things against the
Lord their God that were not right. They built high
places in all their towns from watchtower to fortified
city. **10** They set up for themselves sacred pillars and
Asherah poles on every high hill and under every green
tree. **11** They burned incense there on all the high places
just like the nations that the Lord had driven out before
them had done. They did evil things, angering the Lord.
12 They served idols, although the Lord had told them,
"You must not do this." **13** Still, the Lord warned Israel
and Judah through every prophet and every seer, saying,
"Turn from your evil ways and keep my commands
and statutes according to the whole law I commanded
your ancestors and sent to you through my servants the
prophets."**14** But they would not listen. Instead they
became obstinate like their ancestors who did not believe
the Lord their God. **15** They rejected his statutes and
his covenant he had made with their ancestors and the
warnings he had given them. They followed worthless
idols and became worthless themselves, following the
surrounding nations the Lord had commanded them
not to imitate. **16** They abandoned all the commands
of the Lord their God. They made cast images for
themselves, two calves, and an Asherah pole. They bowed
in worship to all the stars in the sky and served Baal.
17 They sacrificed their sons and daughters in the fire
and practiced divination and interpreted omens. They
devoted themselves to do what was evil in the Lord's
sight and angered him. **18** Therefore, the Lord was
very angry with Israel, and he removed them from his
presence. Only the tribe of Judah remained. **19** Even
Judah did not keep the commands of the Lord their God
but lived according to the customs Israel had practiced.
20 So the Lord rejected all the descendants of Israel,
punished them, and handed them over to plunderers
until he had banished them from his presence.

Intro Options

Main Point:
God's loving discipline is meant to lead us to repentance.

Option 1

The Center for Disease Control (CDC) publishes posters and pamphlets on health issues to spread public knowledge about dangerous diseases. The "spiritual" CDC has asked your student group to prepare pamphlets and/or posters for them on the spiritual epidemic of idolatry. Posters and pamphlets should inform readers on how to identify idolatry, what causes it, what the symptoms of the disease are, what its effects are, how to avoid it, and how to treat or cure it. Give your students drawing supplies and time to create their posters or pamphlets, then let them share what they created. Use any connections you see between their art and the points of the lesson to lead into 2 Kings. As you go through the lesson, you can make connections back to the posters and pamphlets they made.

Option2

Split your kids into two teams; they're going to prep for and hold a mini-debate. The question is, "Are God's commands and judgments for our good?" One team will answer yes; the other team will answer not necessarily, but we should heed them just because God gave them. Give each team a few minutes to prep their arguments, then hold the mini-debate. Give each side sixty seconds to present their case; if you wish, you can give them a second round after each speaks once. If you can, note their main points on paper or on a whiteboard.

After the debate, ask the students to share their personal opinions on the answer to the question, if they wish to do so. Use their answers, both individually and from the debate, to lead into the lesson: today's lesson is going to argue that God's commands are good for us, but idolatry can prevent us from seeing that good.

TEACHING PLAN

Israel was a nation that had received many beautiful promises from God. God promised to be their God. He had promised them a land. He had promised His presence among them. But those weren't the only types of promises God had made. He had also said that if they forgot Him and went after false gods and became like the other nations, there would be consequences—He would remove them from the land and they would fall under harsh rule by other nations. As Scripture reveals, God always keeps His promises—both those of blessing and those of judgment.

Read 2 Kings 17:6-12.

Despite all the good and wise commands that God gave His people, the Israelites disobeyed. Rather than trusting that their greatest joy and fulfillment was in God, His people disregarded His Word and sought out their own ways. Like all of us, the peoples' hearts were set on being satisfied. But instead of being satisfied with God and His ways, they pursued evil thinking it would satisfy.

Look at the manner in which the Israelites worshiped false gods. The passage says that they built for themselves high places in all their towns, from watchtower to fortified city. And they built pillars and Asherim on every high hill and under every green tree. In other words, their worship was all encompassing and completely devout. This language is more exhaustive than exaggerative: on every high hill and under ever green tree, the Israelites built places of worship for these false gods. From the smallest place to the largest place, they served their idols. This was not an easy task. They built and they worked and they made sure that everywhere they went they could worship. Why such devotion? Why such effort in sinning and doing evil against the LORD their God? It was because they deceived themselves to believe that their sin would satisfy and bring joy.

- **Read Hebrews 11:24-26. Why do you think the author describes sin as a fleeting pleasure?**
- **Why is sin incapable of giving us everlasting joy and happiness? Why does it leave us with feelings of shame and guilt?**

Read 2 Kings 17:13-17.

For more than two hundred years, the Lord had allowed His people to live in this promised land, though nearly the whole time they had been engaged in idol worship. From the golden calves of King Jeroboam to the Asherah poles and the altars of Baal, God had patiently held out His hands to a disobedient and contrary people (Isa. 65:2; Rom. 10:21). But they had not turned from their idolatry. Israel must have thought that the day of reckoning for their sin would never come. Surely there would be more patience. But the people were foolish. God had been incredibly patient, but a day of reckoning was coming. The days of patience would not continue forever. Apart from sincere repentance, judgment was coming.

Sin will be judged. Either our sins have been paid for on the cross and we give evidence of that in our regular repentance, or the day of judgment will be for us a day of wrath. The patience of God will have run its course. We must realize that patience without there ever being a day of accountability is not really patience—it's negligence. A parent who will only warn without ever acting on that warning is a negligent parent, and our heavenly Father is not negligent. Though He is slow to anger, by no means will He clear the guilty. There is a day of judgment coming.

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
God's loving discipline is meant to lead us to repentance.

2 Kings 17

7-11. While all the other nations of the world—like Egypt and Assyria—were sinners before God and deserving of His wrath, they didn't know God in the personal and special way He had revealed Himself to Israel. God had never come to them to say, "You are my people and I am your God." He had never given them the goodness of His covenant or the protection of His commands. Israel was different, because God formed Israel through His covenant with Abraham in order to eventually be a blessing to the surrounding nations. God had revealed Himself in power when He rescued Israel from Egypt. God had showed them His goodness and steadfast love as He led them into the promised land while handing over their enemies. He had given Israel kings and prophets. Because of this special and intimate relationship with God, Israel would be held to a greater degree of accountability.

God says the same to those to whom He has revealed Himself today. Those who have been told the news of His great gospel, who have enjoyed fellowship within the body of Christ, who have sat under teaching of the Word, and who have learned of His grace to sinners—for these, it is much worse to reject God and His goodness than if they had never known of His gospel and glimpsed His grace (Heb. 6:4-6). There are greater consequences when you know something of God and His goodness but still choose to walk away from it than if you had never heard of it at all.

13. To hear the call of repentance is to be a recipient of God's grace. Many stories throughout the Old Testament describe the anger of the Israelites when the prophets showed up with their messages of doom and judgment. Prophets were threatened and imprisoned and killed because their words spoke against the sinful hearts and actions of the people they were trying to reach. But each time they came, it was always grace. In love, God was pointing out the sin of His people so that they could see it and repent. God wanted His people to hear, "The things you are turning to offer no hope. There is no salvation anywhere else. Run back to me. I am everything you need." Those words are offensive to the person who has decided for himself what is best. It is difficult for the stubborn heart to hear that there is no hope of saving itself. The gospel is an offensive message to a prideful heart.

99 Essential Doctrines (p. 56, DDG)

Sin as Idolatry

Sin is not only a physical act of rebellion against God, such as lying or stealing, but it is also a matter of the heart. The physical displays of sin are the fruit of what has been birthed in the heart of a person (Matt. 15:10-20). In Scripture, idolatry usually refers to bowing down to a statue made of wood or gold, worshiping created things instead of the Creator. But idolatry can take on more subtle forms: a seeking of approval, security, power, pleasure, etc. We can diagnose the idolatry of our heart by examining the areas where the desires of our heart have turned into idolatrous demands (Jas. 4:1-2).

TEACHING PLAN

- **Do you feel as if you are ever taking advantage of the patience of God when it comes to your sin? If so, why?**

Read 2 Kings 17:18-20.

The people of the tribe of Judah were sinning against God in the same way as the ten tribes of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Judah was just as deserving of judgment from the Lord, but God withheld discipline from them at this time. As the people of Judah watched Israel undergo the consequences from the Lord for their idolatry, it should have served as a wake-up call to them. Seeing the severe disciplining hand of the Lord should have opened Judah's eyes to her own sin and encouraged repentance to avoid the same fate. But Judah, like Israel, was blinded by her idolatry. The judgment that came on the rest of Israel did nothing to shake Judah out of the slumber of sin. Soon judgment would also come for Judah at the hand of the Babylonians and God would allow them to likewise be carried into captivity.

As we live out our faith within the family of God, we might see up close as our brothers and sisters continue in sin and experience discipline from the Lord. As He shakes their lives and humbles their hearts, it is an opportunity for us to examine ourselves. Our not being disciplined in the moment does not mean that we're sinless but perhaps that God is extending another opportunity for us to repent. Rather than continue blindly in our sin, we ought to be awakened to the truth that if we continue in sin without repentance, discipline will come for us as well. Our heavenly Father is too just and too loving not to. Not to mention, if we find ourselves continuing in patterns of sin apart from regular occasions of repentance, then we have grounds to wonder whether or not we are truly among God's people, those who have been born again and enabled to walk in God's statutes. (Deut. 30:6; Heb. 10:26-31)

- **When has God used the discipline of a fellow believer to cause you to repent of your own sins? In what ways could He be doing it now?**

The consequence of Israel continuing in sin against God was the loss of being near His presence. They had enjoyed the privilege of being able to worship Him in the temple, offer sacrifices, experience His sweet blessings, and know Him intimately. But sin had put up a wall between them and God. Sin had robbed them of the only person that could truly satisfy the longing of their hearts: God.

It was the same with Adam and Eve who walked in the garden with God. When they sinned against Him by choosing to obey their desires over God's commands, they were removed from His intimate presence in the garden. Sin prevents us from being able to enjoy the fellowship that God longs for us to have with Him. When Jesus went to the cross, He did so knowing that He would take on the punishment of sin. As a human He experienced the judgment against sin and endured the broken fellowship with His Father so that we could be reconciled to Him. For those who are in Christ, this is what Jesus has accomplished for us on the cross. We are guaranteed never to be forever removed from God's presence.

- **How have you experienced restoration in your relationship with God after experiencing God's discipline?**

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
God's loving discipline is meant to lead us to repentance.

2 Kings 17

14. "A long time has passed since the prophet Ahijah told the wife of Jeroboam I that idolatry would lead to Israel's exile (1 Kings 14:14-16). Over these two hundred years Israel seemed determined to make this prophecy come to pass. No reform occurred. No real repentance emerged No leader called a halt to pagan worship. No prophet was taken seriously. Thus the spare, unadorned description of Samaria's fall is dramatic only in the sense that it is Israel's final scene. God's grace alone has delayed the fall this long."[1]

15. "The writer's frustration is evident as the summary continues. Israel has imitated the worst tradition of their fathers and 'rejected his decrees and the covenant' (v. 15). They practiced worship rites connected with pagan deities. More specifically, they bowed down before Baal and the Canaanite astral gods. Some of them offered human sacrifices. In short, 'They followed worthless idols and themselves became worthless.' Unwilling to serve Yahweh, the only God, the Lord who gives life substance and meaning, they gave their lives to nonentities unable to ennoble a people. Only Judah remains at this point in the history, and they act little better than their northern brothers and sisters. Plunderers like Egypt, Syria, and Assyria should have caused Israel and Judah to come to their senses, but God's covenant people decide to remain senseless. How long can Judah last?"[2]

18. It was the Lord that removed Israel out of his sight; whoever were the instruments, He was the author of this calamity. It was destruction from the Almighty; the Assyrian was but the rod of his anger (Isa. 10:5). It was the Lord who rejected the seed of Israel, else their enemies could not have seized upon them (2 Kings 17:20). Who gave Jacob for a spoil, and Israel to the robbers? Did not the Lord? (Isa. 43:24). We lose the benefit of national judgments if we do not eye the hand of God in them, and the fulfilling of the Scripture, for that also is taken notice of here (2 Kings 17:23): The Lord removed Israel out of his favor, and out of their own land, as He had said by all His servants the prophets. Rather shall heaven and earth pass than any part of God's word fall to the ground. [3]

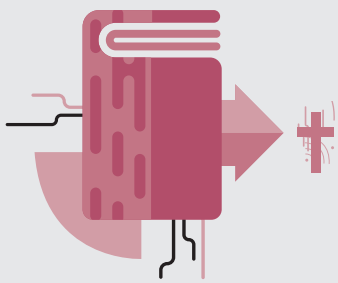
Activity

In pairs or solo, students should think of one of their favorite songs. Their job is to rewrite the lyrics to that song (keep the same melody) so that the song now either warns against idolatry or depicts Jesus' beauty as the cure for idolatry (or both, if they really want to go to town). Many songs give strong praise to something or other, so students may want to choose a song that is already praise-heavy. Give the students some time to re-write their songs, and then have them share the lyrics. Bonus points if they sing it. Super-duper-bonus points if students choose to make a music video (in a skit, or an actual video using their phones or a tool like Flipgrid) for their now-rewritten song.

Alternate activity: imagine your church is burying a time capsule. They've asked your youth group to write notes for the youth group a century from now to read. Have your group compose notes warning the future youth group about the dangers of idolatry and/or the superior pleasures of Jesus.

(p. 58, DDG) Christ Connection

The people of Israel sinned against God and worshiped idols. God warned them to turn from their evil ways and obey Him, but they refused and were disciplined by Him. Israel's rebellion reminds us of our idolatry and need of Jesus who perfectly obeyed God and was punished in our place.



AN IDOLATROUS PEOPLE RECEIVE JUDGMENT

2 Kings 17:6–20

AN IDOLATROUS PEOPLE RECEIVE JUDGMENT

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JESUS CONNECTION

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LIFEWISE QUALITY

PATIENCE – Being willing to wait.

HEAD

What emotional reaction did God have in response to His people's disobedience?

God waited hundreds of years to punish Israel for their sin. According to 2 Peter 3:9, why did God wait so long?

HEART

God is good and merciful. He is patient and kind even when we continue to make choices He knows will hurt us or Him. How does knowing those characteristics about Him affect the choices you make? Or does it?

God wanted the Israelites to turn from their wicked ways, but He was patient with them. How can you show patience and kindness to others, even when they frustrate you or make mistakes? How do you think others would react if they saw you being patient in those ways during a frustrating situation?

HANDS

Patience is hard to learn and even harder to do. Often, we simply rush toward whatever outcome or result we want. But we can be patient with ourselves and others because we know God cares for us and is at work in our lives. He will help us develop patience to wait for Him in hard situations and in everyday life.

Read the scenarios below. Choose the one that is most difficult for you to show patience in. Write 2 action steps you can take to practice patience in that area.

- Waiting on an item you ordered that you really want
- Understanding why your friend hurt you again
- Waiting for God to answer your prayer
- Not yelling at your sibling when you are angry
- Waiting your turn for something
- Practicing a skill (a sport, playing an instrument, learning a language, art, etc.)